250434 - Does saying “Yaa Muhammad” or “Yaa Muhammadaah” constitute shirk?

the question

I am a young man, and sometimes I say “Yaa Muhammad, Yaa ‘Ali, Yaa Sidi Fulaan (O Muhammad, O ‘Ali, O my master So and so).” Someone told me that this is shirk (associating others with Allah). I said to him: I did not associate someone else with Allah, and I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad, ‘Ali and Sidi Fulaan are not gods alongside Allah. I have seen a hadith about a Sahaabi advising a man whose foot went numb and he said to him: Mention the dearest of people to you, so he said: O Muhammad, and the numbness left him. In one of the battles of the Muslims, their slogan was Ya Muhammadaah. If they had committed shirk thereby, then why didn’t the Sahaabah tell them not to do that? And the brothers of Yoosuf said, “O our father! Ask forgiveness (from Allah) for our sins, indeed we have been sinners” [Yoosuf 12:97]; they did not say: O Allah forgive us. If they were committing shirk, then why did he not tell them that this was wrong? Am I a mushrik now or not? If I have committed shirk, will Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, forgive the one who falls into shirk?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

If a person says “Yaa Muhammad, Yaa ‘Ali,” it may be understood in two ways.

1. That it is bringing to mind the one mentioned in this manner, without asking him for anything, such as if he says “Yaa Muhammad” then falls silent, or he says “Yaa Muhammad sall-Allahu ‘alayk

(O Muhammad, may Allah send blessings upon you).” This is not shirk, because it does not involve calling upon someone other than Allah, may He be exalted.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Saying “Yaa Muhammad, Yaa Nabiy Allah (O Muhammad, O Prophet of Allah)” and the like is a call aimed at bringing to mind the person who is mentioned, like when the worshipper says in the prayer “As-salaamu ‘alayka ayyuha’n-Nabiyyu wa rahmat-Allahi wa barakaatuhu (Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings). People do this a great deal, addressing someone in their minds, even though that person is not present to hear what is said.

End quote from Iqtidaa’ as-Siraat al-Mustaqeem li Mukhaalifat Ashaab al-Jaheem (2/319).

2. That this call involves a clear request, such as saying “O Muhammad, do such and such for me”, or it is an implicit request, such as a person who carries a rock or heavy item, and says “Yaa Muhammad” – this is like asking him for help. Both cases are shirk or associating someone with Allah, may He be exalted, because calling upon anyone other than Allah, such as the dead or someone who is absent, constitutes shirk, as is indicated by the religious texts and scholarly consensus.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Who is more unjust than one who invents a lie against Allah or rejects His Ayaat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations)? For such their appointed portion (good things of this worldly life and their period of stay therein) will reach them from the Book (of Decrees) until, when Our Messengers (the angel of death and his assistants) come to them to take their souls, they (the angels) will say: "Where are those whom you used to invoke and worship besides Allah," they will reply, "They have vanished and deserted us." And they will bear witness against themselves, that they were disbelievers”

[al-A‘raaf 7:37]

“And invoke not besides Allah, any that will neither profit you, nor hurt you, but if (in case) you did so, you shall certainly be one of the Zaalimûn (polytheists and wrong-doers)”

[Yoonus 10:106]

“And when they embark on a ship, they invoke Allah, making their Faith pure for Him only, but when He brings them safely to land, behold, they give a share of their worship to others”

[al-‘Ankaboot 29:65] – what is meant by their giving a share of worship to others is their calling upon others besides Allah.

“And whoever invokes (or worships), besides Allah, any other ilaah (god), of whom he has no proof, then his reckoning is only with his Lord. Surely! Al-Kaafirûn (the disbelievers in Allah and in the Oneness of Allah, polytheists, pagans, idolaters) will not be successful”

[al-Mu’minoon 23:65].

This is a general ruling which applies to anyone who calls upon something or someone other than Allah, and it makes no difference whether he calls him an ilaah (god) or a sayyid (master) or a wali (“saint”) or a qutb (a higher rank of “saint”), because the word ilaah (god) in Arabic refers to one who is worshipped, so the one who worships anyone other than Allah has taken him as a god, even if he denies that verbally. And there are many other clear verses that speak of this.

In Saheeh al-Bukhaari (4497) it is narrated that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever dies calling upon anyone besides Allah whom he regards as equal to Him will enter Hell.”

The scholars narrated that there was consensus that the one who says that there are intermediaries between him and Allah, and he calls upon them and asks of them, becomes a

disbeliever, and they did not exclude from that calling upon the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) or anyone else.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Whoever regards the angels or the Prophets as intermediaries, and calls upon them, puts his trust in them, and asks them to bring benefits or word off harm, such as asking them for forgiveness of sins or for guidance, or to relieve hardship or meet needs, is a disbeliever according to the consensus of the Muslims.

End quote from Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (1/124).

This consensus was narrated and affirmed by more than one of the scholars. See al-Furoo‘ by Ibn Muflih (6/165); al-Insaaf (10/327); Kashshaaf al-Qinaa‘ (6/169); Mataalib Ooli an-Nuha (6/279).

It says in Kashshaaf al-Qinaa‘, after mentioning this consensus, in a chapter on the ruling on the apostate: That is because it is like what the idol-worshippers do, and they say: We worship them only that they may bring us near to Allah. End quote.

Thirdly:

There is nothing in the Qur’an or Sunnah that could clearly mean that this type of shirk is permissible, let alone promoting it or encouraging it. How can something that Allah has described as shirk and disbelief in a clear text of the Qur’an then be described as permissible in some other text?

The report that you mention about numbness in the foot does not have a sound chain of narration. Even if it were sound, there is no proof for that argument, because it comes under the heading of bringing to mind the person mentioned, as we have explained above, and it does not imply seeking help from someone other than Allah.

This report has been discussed in detail previously, in the answer to question no. 162967.

Thirdly:

The slogan “Yaa Muhammadaah” or “Waa Muhammadaah” is not mentioned in any sound report as being a slogan used by the Sahaabah in battle, as we shall see below. Even if we assume that it is sound, it does not come under the heading of seeking his help or asking him for something, because there is no suggestion of asking, as is clear from the apparent meaning. Rather it comes under the heading of lamentation, or the call of one who is expressing grief. It is as if the Muslims, by saying that, were encouraging one another to fight by expressing their grief for the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and their grief for what was happening to his religion, as when they said “Waa Islamaah (Alas for Islam).”

Lamentation may be expressed with the particle waa or yaa [which is identical to the vocative particle yaa, usually translated as ‘O’ when it is addressing someone], when there is no room for ambiguity or confusion, as was pointed out by Ibn Maalik in his poem al-Alfiyyah.

Al-Ashmooni said: Waa is used for one for whom one is expressing grief. It may also be used to express what is hurting one, such as saying Waa waladaah (O my child, or Alas my child) [expressing grief for one’s child], or saying Wa ra’saah (O my head) [expressing pain]. Or one may say Yaa waladaah or Yaa ra’saah, using yaa instead of waa. But if saying Yaa will cause confusion, it should be avoided. In other words, Yaa should not be used in lamentation except when there is no risk of confusion.

If there is a risk of confusion, then Waa should be used.

End quote from Sharh al-Ashmooni ‘ala Alfiyyat Ibn Maalik (1/233).

This category includes the words of Faatimah when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died, and she said: O my father (yaa abataah) who answered the call of his Lord. According to another report, she said: waa abataah.

Al-Bukhaari (4462) narrated that Anas said:

When the sickness of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) grew severe, waves of pain overwhelmed him, whereupon Faatimah (peace be upon her) said: O how distressed my father is!

He said: Your father will have no more distress after today.

When he died, she said: O my father [Yaa abataah], who answered the call of his Lord. O my father, whose abode is Jannat al-Firdaws! O my father, to Jibreel we announce the news of his death!

When he was buried, Faatimah (peace be upon her) said: O Anas, how could you bear to throw dust over the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)?

According to a report narrated by Ibn Maajah (1630), [she said]: O my father [Waa abataah], to Jibreel we announce his death; O my father, how much closer he is now to his Lord; O my father, the Paradise of al-Firdaws is his abode; O my father, he has answered the call of his Lord.

This comes under the heading of lamentation, not asking for help.

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar said: When she said ‘Yaa abataah (O my father)’ it is as if she said ‘Ya abi (O my father).’ The extra alif is for lamentation and represents the elongation of the sound, and the haa’ signals the end of the word.

End quote from Fath al-Baari (8/149).

But the slogan is not proven, as we mentioned above.

Shaykh Saalih Aal ash-Shaykh (may Allah preserve him) said, responding to one who said that al-Haafiz Ibn Katheer mentioned that the slogan of the Muslims at the battle of al-Yamaamah was

“Muhammadaah”:

I say: Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) quoted that in a lengthy report about the campaign, and some of the wording of the storytellers was incorporated in the report. As for this slogan, it was narrated by Ibn Jareer in Tareekh al-Umam wa’l-Mulook (3/293). He said: as-Sirri wrote to me (narrating) from Shu‘ayb, from Sayf, from ad-Dahhaak ibn Yarboo‘, from his father, from a man of Banu Suhaym… and he mentioned a story that included this slogan.

I say: This isnaad is problematic, and I do not think that issues of ‘aqeedah and tawheed and other rulings of sharee‘ah should be taken from books of history. Rather the stories of history are narrated for the purpose of learning lessons from them, and are to be believed in general terms, but not in details. Hence Ahmad ibn Hanbal said: There are three for which there is no definitive proof, and he mentioned al-maghaazi (reports about military campaigns)…

The problem with this isnaad is on three counts:

1.

Sayf is the son of ‘Umar, the author of al-Futooh and ar-Riddah. He narrated from many unknown narrators.

Adh-Dhahabi said in Mizaan al-I‘tidaal (2/255): Mutayyin narrated from Yahya: He (Sayf) is not worth a penny. Abu Dawood said: He is worthless.

Abu Haatim said: He is to be rejected.

Ibn Hibbaan said: He was accused of heresy.

Ibn ‘Adiyy said: Most of his hadiths are odd. End quote.

2.

Ad-Dahhaak ibn Yarboo‘: al-Azdi said: His hadith is not sound. I say: He is one of the unknown narrators from whom only Sayf narrated.

3.

The unknown status of Yarboo‘ and the Suhaymi man.

Each of these problems on its own would render the hadith da‘eef (weak), so how about when it is narrated by Sayf ibn ‘Umar, when you know what is wrong with him? We ask Allah to keep us safe and sound.

There is nothing strange about Ibn Jareer narrating such weak stories, and many historians after him narrated it. Ibn Jareer (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his introduction to his book Tareekh al-Umam wa’l-Mulook (1/8): Whatever reports we mentioned in this book of mine of stories about the past that the reader may find odd or reprehensible, because he cannot find any way to verify their soundness and they do not make any sense to him, he should realise that this is not because of us; rather it is because of some of those who transmitted it to us. Here we are only transmitting it as we received it.

End quote from Hadhihi Mafaaheemuna by Shaykh Saalih Aal ash-Shaykh, p. 52

Fourthly:

Allah, may He be exalted, tells us about the brothers of Yoosuf (interpretation of the meaning):

“They said: ‘O our father! Ask forgiveness (from Allah) for our sins, indeed we have been sinners.’

He said: ‘I will ask my Lord for forgiveness for you, verily He! Only He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful’”

[Yoosuf 12:97-98].

This comes under the heading of asking for supplication (du‘aa’) of one who is alive and able to offer supplication, and there is nothing wrong with that according to scholarly consensus.

Their words “Ask forgiveness” mean: ask for forgiveness for us. They did not say “Forgive us,” as you thought.

Several texts indicate that it is permissible to ask someone else to offer supplication, such as the lengthy hadith of Uways al-Qarni, according to which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to ‘Umar: “If you can ask him to pray for forgiveness for you, then do so.” So he went to Uways and said: Pray for forgiveness for me. Narrated by Muslim (2542).

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Chapter on it being recommended to ask people of virtue to offer supplication for one, even if the one who is asking is better than the one of whom he asks this, and supplication in special places:

It should be understood that the hadiths that speak of this are too many to be counted, and it is a matter on which there is scholarly consensus.

End quote from al-Adhkaar (p. 643)

To sum up the above, the basic principle concerning the matter of a person saying “Yaa Muhammad (O Muhammad – blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)” is that it is permissible, so long as it does not involve any asking of him, whether explicitly or implicitly, because that constitutes shirk.

Nevertheless, our advice to you is to avoid this call and avoid saying it a great deal, for two reasons:

1. It may cause people to think ill of you, and to think that you are asking of someone other than Allah.

2. You may get used to saying this phrase and the find yourself saying it when you are in need of help. Hence you should get accustomed to saying Yaa Allah (O Allah), Yaa Hayyu (O Ever-Living), Yaa Qayyoom (O Self-Sustaining), Yaa Dha'l-Jalaali wa'l-Ikraam (O Possesser of Majesty and Munificence). There is nothing better for a slave than to ask of his Master and humble himself before Him, calling upon Him in all circumstances.

Fifthly:

If a person falls into shirk and repents, Allah will accept his repentance. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And those who invoke not any other ilaah (god) along with Allah, nor kill such person as Allah has forbidden, except for just cause, nor commit illegal sexual intercourse __ and whoever does this shall receive the punishment.

69. The torment will be doubled to him on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein in disgrace;

70. Except those who repent and believe (in Islamic Monotheism), and do righteous deeds; for those, Allah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful

71. And whosoever repents and does righteous good deeds; then verily, he repents towards Allah with true repentance"

[al-Furqaan 25:68-70]

And Allah knows best.